In an editorial in the same issue of the JAMA, Ness & Cauley point out “A number of strengths lend validity to the study’s findings” including:

a. Cases and controls were numerous and chosen from a single client source.

b. Cancer diagnoses were confirmed using data from the surveillance, epidemiology and end results program.

c. Among patients in the highest use of antibiotics, risk of breast cancer was similarly increased regardless of the indication (acne, rosacea, or respiratory tract infections).

d. Computerized pharmacy records were used to evaluate antibiotic prescriptions and adjustment was made for a number of potentially confounding facts.

“At the same time, the study methods engendered certain concerns” and the editorial writers expand on the many concerns similar to those elicited by Dr. Elewski. The writers conclude “As is often for reports of new associations, this study provides many (or more) questions than answers.”

In a recent issue of Practical Dermatology, the two sides of “Are we Overusing Oral Antibiotics for Acne?” were discussed by James L. Leyden, M.D. and Guy Webster, M.D., dermatologists from Philadelphia.

Dr. Leyden proposes “Yes. Despite exhaustive educational efforts within the specialty, dermatologists continue to overuse antibiotics to manage acne. Treatment strategies must change.”

Dr. Webster says “No. Antibiotics continue to play a key role in acne management. As long as we carefully select candidates and exhaust other options, we’re not overusing these agents.”

Most dermatologists in clinical practice today concur with Dr. Webster.

a. Long-term oral antibiotic therapy can only be justified when other treatments have failed or can be predicted to fail based on clinical experience.

b. Patients on long-term therapy must also be treated with other modalities such as topical retinoids, benzoyl peroxide and sulphur, or salicylic acid products.

c. Steps should be taken to minimize the changes of results emerging, including treatment with higher doses of oral antibiotics.

References